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BY

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MINISTER OF TRANSPORT

TO THE FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, CONFERENCE

ON

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

**Address by  
Paul Hellyer,  
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OUTWARD MANIFESTATIONS

Much of the discussion at this conference is, naturally, aimed at the provision of housing in our urban environment, and particularly how adequate housing can be provided for low and moderate income families in the context of ever-increasing costs. However, all the housing, stores, and amenities offered in an urban area are of little use if people can't reach them or if the journey to them becomes too unpleasant or too time-consuming.

Society today is becoming increasingly aware that moving around in our urban environment is, in fact, all too often unpleasant and time-consuming. We refer to this phenomenon as the urban transportation problem. In the minds of most people this problem manifests itself in one word, congestion. Peak rush hour traffic during the journey to and from work is an exhaust-pipe nightmare.

#### OTHER FACETS OF THE PROBLEM

To understand how the problem has arisen, and why past attempts at resolution have not been totally effective, it is necessary to realize that the problem has far greater scope than the attempt to overcome congestion. Our cities have been shaped by many diverse factors and, to some extent, have been designed around the early modes of transportation, a prime example being the streetcar. Such modes contributed to high density cores and radial development. This type of development is no longer required with the popular use of the automobile. Extremely flexible, able to go almost anywhere, the automobile has enabled the high density, radial city to disperse. The automobile has been the instrument which spurred the development of low density suburbs. Trends in urban growth in Canada today reflect the attainment of an equilibrium level of population in the city centre and very rapid population expansion in the suburbs, so that the total urban area is changing from a high density central city to what might be called a metropolitan community.

The development of the automobile has enabled our cities to undergo tremendous physical changes which have, in turn, caused many problems of adjustment. One of the difficulties in defining the problem of urban transportation has resulted from the tendency of many

city governments and traffic engineers to look only at the visible aspects of the automobile. Their approach to the solution to the resulting congestion has been the attempt to make it easier for the automobile to move. Large amounts of money have been expended to improve traffic flows. Unfortunately, the results of these expenditures have only eased the pressure in the short run, for in the long run, they have enabled the urban area to continue its process of expansion without providing the means of transportation to cope with the increased requirements of traffic flow. Planning has been too shortsighted, and in particular has not taken into consideration the "total" transportation need of the community.

If a solution is to be found it must be one that comes to grips with the long-run problem. It must, therefore, take full cognizance of the basic nature of the city, and of its future functions in all its parts. It must recognize that there is a direct relationship between transportation and land use, and that efficient transportation systems may well extend beyond the boundaries of any politically defined metropolitan area. The problems can only be effectively treated within the context of the total urban environment.

### BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE ACTION

Although a good deal of thought and money have been spent on remedies to the problems of urban transportation, the results have generally been disappointing. There are a number of causes contributing to this previous lack of success, all of which must be fully appreciated before any effective program of comprehensive urban transportation development can take place.

The first cause is one of cost. Our cities today are spending in excess of 500 million dollars annually on urban transport systems. This is not surprising when one realizes that one mile of urban freeway costs an average of \$4 million but often goes as high as \$20 million or more, and that subway costs generally range in the area of \$10 - 20 million per mile. However, a look at volume of traffic per dollar of expenditure shows that much of the problem stems from misplaced emphasis. The new 12 lane Toronto by-pass, at best, can transport from 4 to 6 thousand passengers per hour at peak, assuming ideal conditions. The Toronto subway system can handle forty thousand in the same span of time, and I would wager that cost differentials are not very significant. We must place more emphasis on cost effectiveness.

Regardless of the form of system considered, many cities seem reluctant to undertake urban trans-

portation programs at these high cost levels because there appears to be little evidence to show that the programs to be undertaken will permanently solve the problem. Such programs may relieve it for a little while but it soon comes back worse than ever. The flow of funds necessary to alleviate the problem, much less solve it, is, therefore, seemingly endless.

Urban governments simply may not have the financial base necessary to undertake extensive programs of urban transportation. Although property taxes are the main source of urban revenue, the Economic Council of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities, and others are convinced that this tax is insufficient to meet present needs. Further, this tax affects only residents of the city, and not the many persons living outside the city limits who commute daily to the city centre, and add appreciably to the peak congestion without making any financial contribution to its alleviation.

This question reveals yet another reason why action that is taken under present circumstances cannot be wholly effective. In order to achieve real success, urban transportation systems must be planned for the whole economic and social area they serve. Yet, in many metropolitan areas, such planning is virtually

impossible because of the fragmentation of local governments. The city by itself cannot hope to cope with this problem, either jurisdictionally or financially. In most cases it is unable to draw on the financial resources of the surrounding parts of the metropolitan community that it serves, or those of the provincial and federal governments, to help supplement its own limited resources.

#### CONSEQUENCES OF TAKING NO ACTION OR THE WRONG ACTION

I have indicated that the Urban Transportation problem is a growing one, and that the costs of dealing with it are likewise growing. In the face of such mounting costs, and because of other priority requirements needing our insufficient capital resources, there may be a tendency to put off the problem to some future date. In view of this possibility, it might be worth while to look at some of the consequences of taking either ineffective action, or no action at all.

The projection of current trends of urban development indicates that the decentralization of existing cities will continue with correspondingly lower land occupation densities. Coupled with generally rising real incomes, this dispersion will result in a more than proportionate increase in automobile ownership and, unless other modes are developed, the automobile will continue to reign as the main means of

travel in this low density, highly dispersed metropolitan area.

When this end product of urban decentralization and dispersion comes about, what could be lost? First, the economic and social contact for which the city was originally formed might be greatly weakened and perhaps lost entirely as a result of communications strangulation stemming from traffic congestion. The second possible loss will be a decline in productivity in the urban area. The services, manufacturing, wholesale, and financial sectors of the economy are located almost entirely in urban areas, and any loss in productivity in the urban sector as a whole will adversely affect these sectors to the detriment of all Canadians.

The social and personal costs of congestion, the smog and sickness, the physical wear and tear on drivers, naturally reduces the productivity of labour and the welfare of the population. The simple cost of the time consumed in getting to and from work is unproductive and has social consequences by reducing the amount of leisure time available to the worker. Incidences of death and injury rise during periods of congestion, and are unacceptable in themselves. They also create increased costs of services such as fire

and police resulting from the need to maintain large levels of preventive action and aid in the face of slow and congested traffic.

Business costs also rise as a result of poor traffic flows. Producers in a congested area, where shipments and deliveries are slowed up, are at a disadvantage to producers in non-congested areas. In addition, if labour translated its time loss in getting to and from work into demands for higher wages or shorter work weeks, the costs of production would rise accordingly.

Vehicle operating costs are also adversely affected by operation in over-crowded environments. Direct operating costs rise markedly, as do insurance and maintenance costs. These are experienced by both private and commercial vehicle operators, and are a useless charge on the economy as a whole. And yet, these are only a few of the implications of improper planning to meet our transportation needs.

Another important consequence which will be discussed by my colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, is pollution. Insofar as transportation is concerned, it is obvious that the various modes of transport result in varying levels of pollution with the automobile or any vehicle with an internal combustion engine being the greatest offender. Because



our concern for the future must embrace a total urban concept with the health of our citizens a priority matter, the ramifications of pollution must be a major factor in any future decisions on new transportation developments.

#### NEED FOR ACTION\_\_

The urban transportation problem cannot be dealt with properly by merely treating its outward symptoms or by treating it in piece-meal fashion. The problem must be considered within the context of all of the factors which go to make up the total urban environment and over the whole area of social and economic interchange. As the problem must be dealt with in this broader context it is very difficult for any individual city or municipality to take effective action on its own, because of the fragmented government structure of our metropolitan communities. Further, I have noted that the expenditures needed to deal with this problem will be large and continuing and that there is some question about the ability of the cities and municipalities to bear this financial burden on their own.

Failure to take effective action, however, will increasingly detract from the social and economic amenities now enjoyed by some 75% of the Canadian population and will add appreciably to the costs of

doing business in several of the major sectors of the economy, thus retarding rises in real income for all Canadians.

Therefore, the urban transportation problem is not so simple as first appears and is correspondingly costly to deal with effectively. The federal government believes, consistent with the objectives outlined in our National Transportation Policy, that an economic, efficient and adequate urban transportation system at the lowest total cost is an essential requirement for a large and ever-increasing number of Canadians. I am sure we all welcome enthusiastically the initiative taken by the Federation of Mayors and Municipalities in this area. These objectives are more likely to be met if a program of research and development is undertaken where new ideas and technology could be tested in the actual urban environment to prove their worth. As a result of this belief, we in the federal government would be not only prepared but most anxious to cooperate in improved research and planning for the solution of urban transportation problems.